

Women of Europe

Delegation

"Mainstreaming" - a radical new approach to equal opportunities for the future Structural Funds

By Pádraig Flynn, European Commissioner with responsibility for Employment and Social Affairs

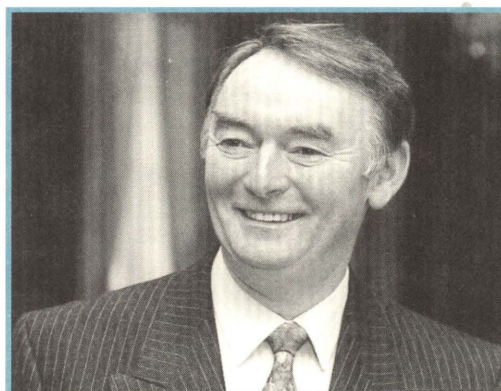
With the current public debate on the reform of the Structural Funds 2000-2006 focusing predominantly on enlargement, budgetary contributions and share out, less attention is being paid to another development, on which the European Commission has been quietly working in recent months.

A new approach to tackling the inequalities between women and men has been agreed by the Commission, which promises to bring, among other things, a radical new orientation to the Structural Funds after 1999. Called "mainstreaming", the approach takes a wide-ranging view on the causes of gender inequality - and a consequently far more thorough approach to its cures. In the future, Structural Fund programmes will have to do much more than finance specific initiatives for women. In addition to the specific European Social Fund policy objective of improving the participation of women in the labour market, the aim is to ensure that throughout the Funds, attention is paid to equal opportunities issues. Structural Funds programmes will be expected to spell out how they intend to promote equality between women and men - before they obtain approval from the European Commission.

This new approach is recognition of the fact that, in spite of women's increasing

presence in the labour market, the differences between men and women in terms of employment opportunities and pay and working conditions remain substantial, and in some cases are worsening.

The "mainstreaming" approach will bring major changes to the preparation and presentation of future Structural Fund pro-



Pádraig Flynn

grammes. Previous Structural Fund Regulations and guidelines tried to focus on equal opportunities, but it has been left largely to the Member States to determine how this should be implemented if at all. As a result, it is difficult to say how equal opportunities issues have been dealt with in the framework of the Structural Funds. This time I am determined to ensure that equal opportunities for women and men should be addressed right across the Structural Fund programmes and initiatives - including those which support infrastructure projects, industrial reconversion and agricultural support measures. This will require systematic monitoring of equal opportunities, with collection of appropriate statistics.

Also new is the word "gender". Equal opportunities have tended to be treated as an issue largely concerning women. The thinking was that the difficulties women face in competing equally with men in the labour market could be remedied by a combination of legislation and positive action, aimed at addressing the specific needs of women. But, whilst the unequal share of domestic work and family care disadvantages women in the labour market, it advantages men. This tends to reinforce discrimination in the employment field.

Pay differentials between the sexes remain virtually unchanged, paralleled by the continued pattern of segregation in the labour market with many working women concentrated in lower-paid levels and in certain economic branches. Official unemployment levels are higher for women than men in the vast majority of Member States, and women form the majority of the poor.

What all this means is that **men have been brought into the picture**. The focus has shifted from women as a group with "additional" needs, to the more complex patterns of relations between and within the "genders". Men are now seen as a crucial part of the solution to gender inequality.

Concretely, I expect to see the Structural Funds contributing to the reduction of disparities between the situation of men and women; in the labour market, in education and vocational training, in entrepreneurship, in the planning and implementation of development initiatives and in terms of access to services (health, transport...) and new technology.

Improved conciliation of work and personal life for women and men is also seen as a key element. Support for childcare and for the care of dependents and improved organisation of working time can make a major impact on women's participation in the labour market.

The Commission expects to see the participation of organisations representing equal opportunities issues in the monitoring committees and partnerships for the programmes in the Member States, and improved participation of women themselves in the preparation and implementation of Structural Fund actions. For example, the new Regulations recommend the balanced participation of men and women on monitoring committees.

I am confident that equal opportunities will be a key element of the next phase of structural funding. The new provisions will ensure that equality issues will be addressed across the range of programmes and initiatives. ●

Editorial

Over the coming months, the Women of Europe newsletters will continue to examine issues of paramount importance to the European Union and its future development in the light of their impact on women. With the aim of better informing our readers and to widen the debate, we are inviting prominent personalities to give their views and to write editorials. This series starts with Pádraig Flynn, European Commissioner with responsibility for Employment and Social Affairs, looking at the reform of the Structural Funds in the context of mainstreaming. ●

Ana Paula Laissy.

Ana Paula Laissy

Head of Section - Information for Women

structural funds

Equal opportunities central to reforms

A radical revamp of the EU's funding system for regional and local development, the Structural Funds, is at the heart of proposals adopted by the European Commission in March as the first step to implement the reforms outlined in the July 1997 "Agenda 2000" communication (see Newsletter No 74). Equal opportunities are central to the proposed reforms to the Structural Funds and the European Social Fund (ESF).

The Commission wants to insert in the new Structural Fund regulation a commitment "to make a continued, deepened and determined effort to mainstream the principle of equal opportunities for women and men into operations supported by the Structural Funds."

Monika Wulf-Mathies, the European Commissioner responsible for regional policy and the regional fund said equal treatment is not just a question for women or a matter of rights. "Where women are active partners they bring a new dimension focusing on the quality of life and solidarity between generations. They encourage a search for new solutions. Taking into account the needs and sensitivities of women favours appropriate investment choices but also sustainable development which respects the environment and which creates social links," she said.



Monika Wulf-Mathies

Three new Objectives explained

To streamline the Funds, the Commission plans reducing the number of priority objectives for aid from the current seven to three. These include two regional objectives, covering the EU's poorest regions or those in structural need, and a horizontal human resources objective. The European Social Fund (ESF) has been redesigned to become the financial arm for implementing the European Employment Strategy (see article by Pádraig Flynn) adopted at the end of last year.

All regions in the EU will be re-evaluated to determine which of the new Objectives they may qualify for.

The new **Objective 1** will aim to help the EU's less developed regions whose per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is less than 75% of the Union average. Current Objective 1 regions no longer qualifying for funding will have their assistance phased out

over a six-year period. Approximately 2/3 of funding is earmarked for Objective 1 regions, and will benefit an estimated 20% of the population.

The economic and social reconversion of areas experiencing structural difficulties, including those in wealthier Member States, will be eligible for support under the new **Objective 2**. These include areas facing decline in industry, the services and fisheries sectors; rural zones confronted with serious problems such as depopulation as well as deprived inner city areas. Support from Objective 2 will benefit 18% of the European population.

The activities of the old ESF will be regrouped under the new **Objective 3** which aims to support the adaptation and modernisation of education, training and employment policies and systems across the EU. In its proposal, the Commission identifies five main areas for ESF activity. These are closely related to the four pillars of the Employment Strategy. They cover active labour market policies to fight unemployment; the promotion of social inclusion; increased employability through life-long education and training systems; anticipating and facilitating economic and social change; and improving the participation of women in the labour market.

The Commission also announced a simplification and concentration of the ESF funded Community Initiatives which will be reduced from the existing two (Employment and Adapt) to one to combat discrimination and inequalities in access to the labour market.

Under the new proposals, the Commission calls on Member States to ensure that regional and local authorities, the social partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including those promoting equal opportunities and environmental protection, should be consulted when elaborating, monitoring and evaluating the Structural Fund programmes.

Once adopted by EU Ministers, these proposals will pave the way for decision-making on the policy and financial reforms required for further enlargement of the EU from the present 15 to over 20 Member States. ●

Gender mainstream

The European Commission adopted in March 1998 a Communication "Incorporating equal opportunity policies and activities" (Com (96) 67). The Commission committed itself to take into account the responsibilities of women and men into all Community policies and activities. This is what is known as gender mainstreaming. Two years have been made in implementing this policy, ceasing to be "untouched", the report found.

This first report (Com (98) 122), according to the goals of the 1996 Communication (see Newsletter No 59) describes how new structures have been put in place within the Commission to ensure equality of opportunity is systematically included in all policies and activities. Twenty-nine Commission services have appointed officials with specific responsibility for developing the mainstreaming process within their Directorate Generals (DGs). But, the report stressed, this effort needed to be continued, further developed and expanded if "genuinely gender-integrated policies" are to be achieved.

The report found only a few cases where the concept of "mainstreaming" was used as an excuse for eliminating specific budget lines or withdrawing resources set aside to promote women. It said, "it is crucial to keep in mind that mainstreaming means a strengthening of efforts" to promote equal opportunities and this includes specific measures and budget lines. "It should consequently mean more resources are allocated to this purpose, not less," it concluded.

A number of Commission services and policy areas were singled out by the report as having successfully started to mainstream equality. These were development co-operation and women's human rights (DG IB/VIII), employment policy and the Structural Funds (DG V), education, training and youth (DG XXII), Commission staff policies (DG IX) and Information policies (DG X). Although the report noted that these

But what does it mean?

In a recent publication *One hundred words for equality**, the Commission defined gender mainstreaming as "the systematic integration of the respective situations, priorities and needs of women and men in all policies and with a view to promoting equality between women and men and mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account, at the planning stage, their effects on the respective situations of women and men in implementation, monitoring and evaluation."

*A glossary of 100 terms used by equality experts explaining a number of gender-related concepts published by the European Commission (DG V).

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aming in focus

In the first follow-up report to its 1996 Committee for women and men into all Commu- In this Communication, the Commission active priorities and needs of both women ities from the earliest planning stage. This is years later, although "considerable" progress tain services and policy sectors "remained

were DGs with a strong tradition of equal opportunities policies, the move away from isolated measures in favour of women to a more integrated approach was noteworthy.

The most visible achievement was in employment policy with the adoption of the employment guidelines at the end of 1997, which had equal opportunities as one of its four main pillars (see Newsletter No 76). The report stressed the importance of ensuring equal opportunities was incorporated into the other three pillars – improving employability, developing entrepreneurship and encouraging adaptability.

"Piecemeal" progress in some fields

Despite progress in these fields, the report remained critical. It said that a look at the "large number of activities" to promote equality showed "the majority are isolated measures without major impact on the overall situation with regard to gender equality. Neither do these activities seriously challenge the orientation of mainstream community policies".

Three main obstacles were identified to progress. These were a lack of awareness of gender issues at decision-making levels, a lack of human and budgetary resources given to mainstreaming and a lack of gender expertise. Another major obstacle was the lack of "high-level backing" within the Commission services.

In response, the report recommended a number of measures including awareness raising targeting, as a priority, senior and middle management; large-scale training to develop the necessary gender expertise; regular gender impact assessment of policies; and gender proofing to guarantee the quality of all legislative proposals, policy documents or Community activities.

Crucial areas ignored

The Information Society, European Monetary Union (EMU), the single market and enlargement of the Union were some of the crucial policy areas which remained untouched by the policy of mainstreaming. The report recommended that these sectors should be given a "high gender profile". It also urged a "coherent" gender approach to the implementation of the 5th action programme on research and technological development.

The report called for an assessment of the impact of the Euro on gender to avoid a situation where the transition to EMU affected women adversely. The impact of enlargement in terms of equality also needed to be addressed more systematically. It said the full body of EU equality law must be incorporated in the pre-accession strategies of the candidate countries and equality between women and men made "an explicit issue of the core proposals". ●

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European Commission
DG V/D.5
Rue Joseph II 27
B-1040 Brussels
Fax: (32.2) 296 35 62

parliament

Committee on Women's Rights

Progress on equal opportunities in 1997 and prospects in the field for 1998 dominated the Committee's January and February meetings. Social Affairs Commissioner Pádraig Flynn and Harriet Harman and Joan Ruddock, respectively British Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, outlined future plans.

Commissioner Flynn promised that 1998 would be a good year for equality with more advances expected especially on the employment front. He said the European Commission will ensure commitments on employment and equal opportunities made at last November's Employment Summit would be reflected in each country's national action plans. This means measures to promote women's employment, reconcile family and working life and to raise the level of care provision. Efforts would also continue to mainstream equality not only into all policy sectors and Structural Fund programmes but in all other Community programmes, he said. As part of this, gender proofing will be introduced for all legal and policy proposals.

Harriet Harman and Joan Ruddock outlined the UK presidency's overriding aim 'to make Europe work for the people'. Ms Harman said the Presidency intended "driving

forward" issues of concern to women, particularly in relation to employment and employability. This involved a fresh look at the organisation of working life and its conciliation with family life. Raising awareness of the problems of violence against women and trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation would also be high on the UK agenda, she said.

The Committee also looked at reports and opinions on budgetary questions, human rights in the EU in 1996, the 1997 demography report and the proposed new EU co-operation agreements with ACP countries.

Does unemployment hit women harder than men?

Women have achieved equality with men on at least one score in the employment field – they make up 50% of the unemployed, according to a representative of Eurostat speaking at the Committee's public hearing on the impact of unemployment on women. Raymonde Dury (PSE, Belgium) is

drafting a report for the Committee on this subject.

The hearing looked at how technological change or labour market restructuring had affected women's employment and examined ways of reconciling work and family life. It sought to identify ways of tackling women's unemployment and encouraging women to re-enter the labour market.

A range of recommendations were put forward by invited speakers who included representatives of employers and trade unions. Reductions in working time and overtime were some of the suggested measures to cut unemployment. Also recommended was support for women to set up their own businesses, better childcare and eldercare provision, narrowing the wages gap between women and men and training for women to improve their access to better paid jobs. ●



Harriet Harman
Secretary of State
for Social Security (the UK)
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Women and science

Women and science is the focus of a major conference jointly organised by the European Commission and the European Parliament. The conference, to be held in Brussels on April 28 and 29, will involve women scientists and engineers in a discussion on the contribution of women to scientific research and the difficulties facing women in these sectors. A round-table debate with decision-makers from the world of research will examine what needs to be done to promote equal opportunities in scientific research. Edith Cresson, the European Commissioner responsible for research, innovation, education, training and youth, will round up the conference by outlining the agenda for equal opportunities in the 5th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. ●

For more information, contact:

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DG XII

Socio-economic research: analysis and forecasting

Rue de la Loi 200 - SDME 3/82

B-1049 Brussels

Fax: (32.2) 296 42 99

E-mail: claire.simonini@dgXII.cec.be

Court rejects same-sex claim

Current EU equal treatment legislation does not cover discrimination based on sexual orientation, according to a recent ruling by the European Court of Justice (ECJ). But, the Court warned, this will change once the new provisions on non-discrimination in the Amsterdam Treaty are ratified.

Lisa Grant, a UK railway worker, challenged her employer's refusal to offer the same travel concessions to her female partner as to the spouses or unmarried partners of other employees. The company justified its refusal explaining that for unmarried people, concessions could only be granted to partners of the opposite sex who were in a stable relationship for at least two years.

The Court backed the company saying that because travel concessions would be refused to a male worker living with a male partner, there was no discrimination based on sex. The refusal applied in the same way to men as to women. The Court also said that under EU or international conventions, same-sex relationships were not equivalent to marriage or partnerships between members of the opposite sex. ●

C-249/96

Lisa Jacqueline Grant v South West Trains Ltd

A copy of this ruling can be downloaded from the

Court's Internet site:

<http://www.curia.eu.int>

EU present at UN women's meeting

Violence against women was one of the four main issues discussed during this year's meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held in New York in March. The EU, represented by the British Minister for Women Joan Ruddock, tabled a proposal to hold a major international conference on this issue in 1999 during the Finnish Presidency. The EU also took an active part in the other issues discussed at the meeting, that is the rights of girl children, women in armed conflict and women's human rights. The European Women's Lobby, representing European women's NGOs, organised a European Women's Caucus and submitted a consultation document to the Presidency as part of NGO's input into the CSW. ●

Information from the CSW internet site:

<http://www.un.org.womenwatch/daw/csw>

or from the

European Women's Lobby

Rue du Méridien 22

B-1210 Brussels

Fax: (32.2) 219 84 51

<http://www.womenlobby.org>

New assembly for Committee of the Regions

Only 15% of the new representatives of the Committee of the Regions are women despite a resolution by the outgoing assembly at the end of 1997 urging Member State governments to appoint more women to this consultative organisation on regional affairs. Although considered as a disappointing result, this still represents a slight increase on the previous assembly, which counted only 10% women. During its first official meeting, the Committee elected German Socialist Dr Manfred Dammeyer – currently Minister for Federal and European Affairs in the German Land of Nordrhein Westfalen – as its President. ●

For more information, contact:

Committee of the Regions

Rue Belliard 79

B-1040 Brussels

Fax: (32.2) 282 23 35

Call for proposals: information for women and young people

A call for proposals is due to be published in the Official Journal of the European Communities for projects working on transnational information and communication initiatives targeting women and young people. This action seeks to inform and spark debates among both groups about the objectives of the European Union and on policies concerning them specifically. Private and public organisations, groups or associations seeking to include the issue of greater European integration in their work are invited to respond. Activities such as events, information meetings, audio-visual programmes, publications, the creation of networks or other innovative projects will be co-financed to the tune of 50%. Only not-for-profit organisations and activities are eligible. ●

To request a copy of the Official Journal text, contact:

European Commission

DG X – Information,

Communication, Culture, Audiovisual

Rue de la Loi 200

B-1049 Brussels

Fax: (32.2) 299 38 91 (women's projects)

(32.2) 299 92 02 (youth projects)

Also available from European Commission Representative Offices in the 15 Member States

agenda

Agenda is a new feature of the Newsletter

It provides information on events we think are of interest to our readers. The content of this Agenda is based on material available at the time of going to press.

Women and Science Conference

28-29 April 1998, Brussels

Contact: Claire Simonini

Fax: (32.2) 296 42 99

E-mail: claire.simonini@dgXII.cec.be

Kvinnor Kan (Women Can) Idea and Trade Fair

14-17 May,

Norrköping and Linköping, Sweden

Contact: The Kvinnor Kan Foundation

Internet: <http://www.kvinnorkan.se>

E-mail: info@kvinnorkan.se

Fax: (46.8) 791 88 34

UK Presidency Conference

Employability of Women (EU Ministers)

5-6 May 1998, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Workshop on Women and Europe

6-10 July 1998, Centro Nacional de

Cultura, Lisbon, Portugal

Contact: CNC – Fax: (351.1) 342 82 50